

# Farmington planners say concerns about downtown can be addressed

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

Within a careful scale, Oakland County Main Street Planner Bob Donohue Jr. said downtown Farmington can keep its traditional historic core and have a mixed use, two- or three-story development.

"You don't want to blow out and become anything like Royal Oak, but you can keep your community character on a manageable scale," Donohue said.

Donohue made his comments at the Tuesday meeting with Farmington Downtown Development Authority members, businesses, residents and visitors at the Masonic Temple.

"They came to discuss the Oakland County Main Street technical assistance grant recently awarded to the DDA. DDA Board Member Frank Clappison called the area west and northwest of Farmington Road and Grand River 'underutilized.'"

Donohue mentioned complaints about too many discount businesses in Farmington.

**'You don't want to blow out and become anything like Royal Oak, but you can keep your community character on a manageable scale'**

Bob Donohue Jr.  
Main Street planner

The community doesn't need to "freak out" with the presence of some of the bargain businesses, Donohue said. "But you don't want to recruit that stuff."

Annelise Morrison, a Farmington resident, called these businesses "out of control." Judy Marlette, her mother, who recently moved to Farmington from Rochester, called Bargain Books in the new store which replaced Shoe Carnival, "a dive with tacky signs."

Donohue said some Main Street communities made changes in their sign ordi-

nances. "Be careful what you ask for and you might get it if we start tinkering with the sign ordinance," said Farmington Mayor Jim Mitchell. "One thing about the Bargain Books store is if we don't like the signs, we do know that it is on a short-term lease. If we start following some of these points, we may be able to bring in a different business." Helping landlords find better businesses will mean that they won't just fill a space, he said.

"We have to be patient," Mitchell said. "I think we are all very frustrated right now." Clappison asked how the DDA can prevent a landlord like Kimco from filling a vacancy in the Farmington Downtown Center with a business that is desired in the downtown mix.

The economic restructuring committee will devise a business recruitment and retention strategy, responded Donohue, a former Rochester DDA director.

"You're going to be out recruiting businesses months ahead," he said. "You have to have that relationship. You

have to be on top of the game."

Donohue advised giving landlords a ready-to-go list of businesses.

"This strategy needs to get off the ground in less than a year, because more discounters will show up, Donohue said.

He praised the city's commitment to reviving its downtown community, which is why the DDA received the Main Street technical grant. Donohue also felt new DDA Director Brent Morgan would be a great asset as well. "Unfortunately the city is losing that institutional memory in the tremendous person of City Manager Frank Laubhoff," Donohue said.

Laubhoff retires Jan. 3. "Real downtowns are forever," Donohue said. "This town has been here 150-plus years. You can't do those instant, freeze-dried downtowns and ever match the quality you've got. Good luck Novi. Good luck Village of Rochester in Rochester Hills. The test is will those fakes be around in 50 years?"

Laubhoff said. "You need a solid market analysis. You need to know what market you aren't reaching and who's not shopping downtown." Farmer's Market, held Saturdays during the summer, is also an asset. Donohue said Farmington is among a handful of cities in Oakland County to have received Main Street grants, planners pointed out.

Besides Farmington, Pontiac also received an award in 2002.

Ferndale, Lake Orion and Holly received the grant in 2001, and Rochester, Royal Oak and Walled Lake got it in 2000, the first year.

For more information or to volunteer for a committee, call Brent Morgan at (248) 473-7276.

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## MAIN STREET

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Masonic Temple on Tuesday.

An important part of achieving the DDA's goals for its central business district will be learning what residents, businesses, visitors and shoppers want for the downtown area and determining how it can happen.

"A lot of people said you have too much asphalt, too much blacktop and not enough visual enticement," Kalogeresis said. "There's many ways to accommodate parking. It doesn't have to be one sea of asphalt. Don't let parking be the reason you don't do development."

### 'LET'S GET ROLLING'

Oakland County downtown trends show more mixed uses - residential and office. "The more uses you have for your downtown, the more reasons people want to come to your downtown. There's more things to do."

Kalogeresis saw plenty of energy available to accomplish the transformation. "I think a lot of people are saying, 'Let's get rolling.' Sometimes we have to go into a community and beat the horse to see if there is a pulse in the community."

DDA Director Brent Morgan was pleased with the turnout at the sessions, which drew 50-60 people. Another positive lies in the fact that the DDA is in great

shape financially. Kalogeresis said. "What needs to happen now is getting the committees off the ground."

Committees focusing on organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring are expected to meet in January.

The DDA will need to add a part-time staff assistant, he said.

Though some people told the officials Farmington needed a defining theme or a slogan, Kalogeresis said the city needs to improve its overall plan and appearance. Nice storefronts and quality businesses exist, but more design work is necessary.

"We need to work with the property owners very closely - in the ways of better storefronts and better merchandise in their stores. The design committee is really going to get active about educating property owners about their investments. We'll show you along the way about the best way to educate them through seminars and workshops."

Although Donohue didn't advocate tax breaks, businesses can be helped through matching grants and developing incentive programs. "I understand there is a low-interest loan program which you have which isn't as active as it should be. That's probably because property owners don't want to go through the red tape when they can go to the bank and get the same interest rate."

## TWO DOWNTOWNS

Farmington has two downtowns, he said. At its core, store fronts on the sidewalk make window shopping possible.

The other downtown is the strip mall, where business owners say they don't see walking traffic.

"There are no visual incentives to do so. One person told us there's just too many curb cuts in the sidewalk. When you have to traverse curb cuts, you are always looking to see if there are cars coming. Does that really make you feel like this is a safe environment where you want to walk?"

The planners advised more downtown events and promotions for Farmington's "unmet demand." They recommended more events like the Founder's Festival.

Also needed: consistent marketing. Many people don't know Farmington has a promotional brochure because it's not seen around town.

"A couple people told us that Farmington is known as being No. 1 in the state and the country in music education, in music programs," Donohue said. "You need to promote that. Develop some

music events downtown which can involve the students. Develop music events using the Civic Theatre."

People complained about discount stores, whose ranks swelled recently with the addition of a Bargain Books store in a large, highly visible space in the Downtown Farmington Business Center. "The answer is, 'Yes you can manage the business mix,'" Donohue said.

"You need a solid market analysis. You need to know what market you aren't reaching and who's not shopping downtown."

Farmer's Market, held Saturdays during the summer, is also an asset. Donohue said Farmington is among a handful of cities in Oakland County to have received Main Street grants, planners pointed out.

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Round	72ct G/SI2	\$5,054 \$2,021
Marquise	1.07ct J/SI1	\$8,988 \$4,494
Princess	1.02ct E/VVS2	\$12,674 \$6,337
Emerald Cut	2.07ct I/VVS2	\$27,664 \$11,065
Round	4.33ct J/VSI	\$73,350 \$33,000

### Fine Jewelry

Regular	Sale
Gen's sterling silver and enamel cufflinks	\$45 \$25
Honora Trio Set with pearl necklace, bracelet, earrings, 14kt YG clasps	\$173 \$87
14kt YG dia. bezel set pendant, 1 rd. 52ct	\$1,218 \$365
14kt WG mg. dia. stud earrings, .69ctw	\$1,869 \$560
14kt YG emerald bracelet, 20 oval emeralds, 10 diamonds 3.45ctw	\$2,250 \$1,350
14kt YG earrings, 54 baguette diamonds, 16 baguette rubies 2.75ctw	\$4,050 \$1,822
14kt YG dia. necklace, 1 rd. 1.54ct	\$10,654 \$4,261
18kt YG bezel dia. pendant, 1 rd. 5.46ct	\$45,000 \$18,000

### A few examples at the Lake Orion location:

Diamonds	Regular	Sale
Marquise	.34ct E/I1	\$785 \$314
Round	.46ct F/SI2	\$1,288 \$450
Princess	.52ct H/SI1	\$2,275 \$960
Round	.74ct K/SI2	\$3,114 \$1,401
Heart	1.58ct G/I1	\$7,395 \$2,588
Princess	.76ct G/VVS2	\$6,640 \$3,320
Pear	1.02ct G/VS2	\$9,380 \$4,220
Round	1.77ct H/VVS2	\$24,240 \$12,120

### Fine Jewelry

Regular	Sale
14kt YG diamond huggie earrings	\$225 \$135
14kt YG grape garnet and diamond ring	\$391 \$294
14kt YG dia. pendant, 1 marquise .67ct	\$1,435 \$430
14kt WG fancy bar and knot link bracelet, 152 rd. dia. 1.20ctw	\$1,485 \$891
14kt YG diamond stud earrings, .90ctw	\$2,648 \$1,324
14kt WG ring, 1 oval opal 5.50ct, 20 rd. diamonds 1.00ctw	\$5,124 \$2,562
14kt YG ruby and dia. bracelet, 9.00ctw	\$7,500 \$4,500
Estate platinum diamond pin, 11 marquise, 2 pear, 55 baguette, 11 rd., 5.19ctw	\$15,658 \$6,255

\*Many items are one of a kind and subject to prior sale. Certain designer lines and gifts are excluded.

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